



PRESS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

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Contact: *CI-HQ-COMMUNICATIONSEDUCATION@ci.irs.gov
IRS – Criminal Investigation

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Former Bank Teller and Check Cashier Indicted for Cashing Fraudulently Obtained Tax Refund Checks

A federal grand jury sitting in Macon, Georgia, returned two indictments today against residents of Columbus, Georgia, charging crimes related to several stolen identity tax refund fraud schemes, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciraolo of the Justice Department's Tax Division and Acting U.S. Attorney G.F. Peterman, III, for the Middle District of Georgia.

Tonya Alexander is charged with one count of conspiracy to commit theft of public money and ten counts of theft of public money. The indictment alleges that, between June 2012 and December 2013, Alexander worked as a bank teller at SunTrust Bank in Columbus. Alexander was allegedly approached by several co-conspirators who wanted her to cash fraudulently obtained tax refund checks in exchange for a fee. The income tax refunds were generated by tax returns filed using stolen identities. It is further alleged that Alexander recruited another bank teller to assist her in cashing the fraudulent tax refund checks. In total, Alexander and her co-conspirators are alleged to have cashed over 500 tax refund checks that fraudulently claimed over \$1 million in tax refunds.

George Rowell is charged with one count of conspiracy to commit theft of public money, seven counts of theft of public money and two counts of passing forged U.S. Treasury checks. The indictment alleges that between January 2013 and December 2013, Rowell owned and operated Big O's Package Store located in Columbus. Rowell offered check cashing services at his store. Rowell was allegedly approached by several co-conspirators who wanted him to cash fraudulently obtained tax refund checks in exchange for a fee. The tax refunds were generated by tax returns filed using stolen identities. Rowell allegedly charged his co-conspirators 10 percent of the check's face value and permitted at least one co-conspirator to forge the endorsement on the checks in his presence. In total, Rowell and his co-conspirators are alleged to have cashed over 250 tax refund checks worth more than \$600,000.

If convicted, Alexander and Rowell each face a statutory maximum sentence of five years in prison for the conspiracy counts and 10 years in prison for each count of theft of public money. Rowell also faces a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in prison for each count of passing a forged U.S. Treasury check. Both defendants also face monetary penalties, supervised release and restitution.

An indictment merely alleges that crimes have been committed. The defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciraolo and Acting U.S. Attorney Peterman commended special agents of Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation and the U.S. Secret Service, who investigated the cases and Trial Attorney Michael C. Boteler of the Tax Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Crawford L. Seals of the Middle District of Georgia, who are prosecuting the cases.

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